

**VIRTUAL DANCE:**  
Summer session is planned in July

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and reshaped them for an online audience.

Liddell explained, “I set it up so that all of our classes would be offered on the Zoom platform and remain on their normal schedule. There was a big learning curve for me and the other teachers, and it took many hours to get it all set up, to communicate to our families how we would be continuing, and to help them understand how to access their child’s classes.

“We started our online schedule April 6, and are so grateful and amazed at the adaptability of our dancers and families and the continued support to make it all work.”

She added, “The kids have been dancing in their homes — anywhere from bedrooms to living rooms, to kitchens, to hallways, outside in their backyard, you name it, we’ve pretty much seen it!”

One benefit of virtual classes is an opportunity for more parental engagement. Instead of waiting in the car for their kid’s class to finish, mom, dad, and the rest of the family can join in.

Dance mom Tara Shafer was moved after watching her daughter dance during a

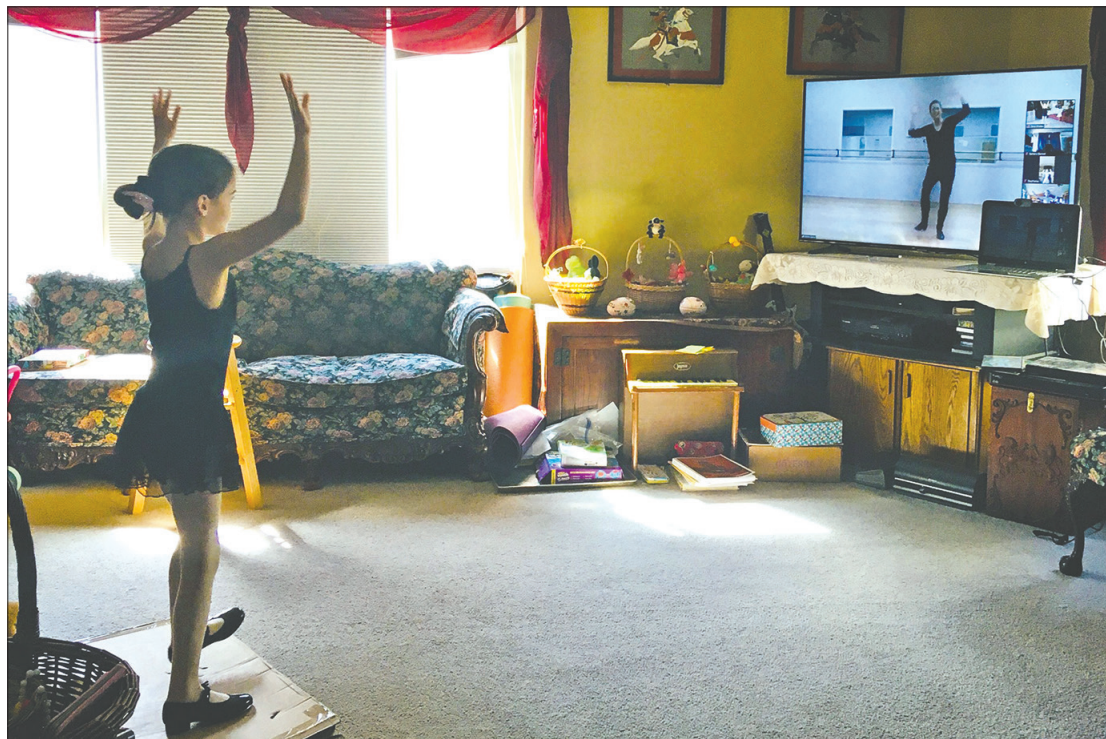


PHOTO PROVIDED

A young dancer works on her moves with virtual tutoring from Lonnie Liddell.

Zoom class.

Shafer said, “I wasn’t expecting to get emotional during Autumn’s first COVID-19 quarantine dance class, but it hit me hard how strong the human spirit is and I couldn’t stop the tears!”

As with any new platform, there are always struggles and learning and teaching online is very different than being physically there.

“Some of our students just couldn’t continue with the online format for varying reasons and over 30 percent of our students chose to end their dance season early,” Liddell said. “Not only financially was this a big loss to the studio, but with each student’s farewell, our hearts ached to not to be able to continue teaching and connecting with them.”

This is the first time in 11 years that Sisters Dance Academy did not present a live show in June.

Liddell said, “It has been a difficult thing to accept — not only for myself as the artistic director, but for our teachers and students. The spring show

is something we all look forward to and train for all year long. The June performance also brings in revenue that helps support and maintain the studio through its slower summer months.”

Then something unforeseen took place. Candy Williams, parent to teacher and choreographer Kayla Williams, and Andrea McAffrey, sister to Kayla Williams and a parent of a dance student, recognized the hardship the dance studio would be facing with the effects of losing students, not having a spring performance and on the business as a whole. They organized a

GoFundMe fundraiser for the academy to help support the programs through these difficult months.

“When I got word that they were doing this, I was overwhelmed with gratitude, humbled beyond measure, and was literally brought to tears,” Liddell said. “In not even two weeks’ time, the fundraiser goal they had set for \$6,000 was met.”

As Oregon entered Phase 1 of re-opening, Liddell was met with another wave of big decisions to be made.

“We wanted to be able to reopen and bring students back in, but we knew there were still many uncertainties.

I wanted to be able to make decisions that gave our families flexibility and choices for students returning to our physical dance space. I decided for a slow open starting in June.”

Sisters Dance Academy will gradually bring dancers back in person with all of the COVID-19 protocols in place and continue to offer all of their classes online through Zoom, so if families still feel uncomfortable to return, they can still dance online. They plan for the Spring 2020 season to conclude the fourth week of June.

Liddell noted, “We have also decided we will be doing recordings of each of our classes the fourth week of June. Students who choose not to return to the physical studio have been asked to record themselves performing their choreography at home and submit them to us. We will then be editing together all of the footage for a special recorded showcase that will be available to our dance families as a free digital download.”

Going forward the dance academy will be having a six-week summer session from July 13 through August 21, which will include a combination of small in-person classes and online offerings. Once the summer schedule is finalized it will be available to view and enroll online through their website, [www.danceinsisters.com](http://www.danceinsisters.com).

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— Lonnie Liddell

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